

# **Beyond the Horizon of Time**

## **Is Reincarnation Buddhist?**

Ven. Mahathera Dr. Madawela Punnaji



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## FOREWORD

When someone meets with an unforeseen disaster like “tsunami,” we often hear people say, “Oh, it must be his or her karma.” All Buddhists will not only seem to agree but they will also try to sympathize with the unfortunate individual. Even the individual who suffers from the disaster will accept it and do nothing about it, other than cry and lament. It is this common reaction of Buddhists that makes people often say, “Buddhism is a pessimistic religion.” Is this attitude of the Buddhists in agreement with the teachings of the Buddha?

The Buddha has always pointed out that it is not what circumstance a person meets that matters but it is one’s attitude to the circumstance that really matters. This means, it is how one acts in response to the circumstance that is most important. **Karma** means **action**, not the **consequence** of the action. The consequence is called *vipaka*. Most Buddhists make the mistake of calling the consequence *karma*. It is the way one responds to one’s circumstances that matters not the circumstance alone. In other words, “It is your attitude that determines your altitude.”

Although this wrong attitude is prevalent today among Buddhists as well as Hindus and is accepted as correct, it was not accepted by the Buddha. This was why the Buddha was never a pessimist. The notion of karma and rebirth existed in India long before the Buddha. The Buddha even accepted it as true, after he became enlightened. Yet the Buddha did not centre his teaching on the notion of karma and rebirth. He did not base his ethical teachings or his higher spiritual teachings on the notion of “karma and rebirth.” Karma was of course the reason why often bad things happened to good people or even good things happen to bad people. Some disciples of the Buddha even gained the ability to

recall their own past lives and even the past lives of others through meditation as taught by the Buddha. Thereby they understood that karma and rebirth was a fact.

However, the Buddha did not lay stress on the development of psychic powers, or even the self-centered “punishment-reward” morality based on the belief in past and future lives, with the desire to go to Heaven or to escape hell. The Buddha taught an unselfish morality, which was not based on punishment and reward, but based on “love,” or the concern for the weal and welfare of all beings (*metta*). The reason why the Buddhist should refrain from harming life is not because he might go to hell as a result, but because he feels a concern for other living beings. He feels that the happiness of others is as important as one’s own. The Buddhist is not a narrow minded individual, but he is one who thinks with a brought mind that encompasses all beings. This method of moral teaching of the Buddha is called the self-reflexive method of teaching (*attupanayika dhamma pariyaya*); “Do unto others as if others were you.”

Ven. Dr. M. Punnaji has made a research lasting more than 50 years on the original teachings of Buddha, which he called “Proto Buddhism.” He has discovered that Karma and rebirth is not an essential dogma, to blindly believe in, for one who wants to practice Buddhism. In fact, the unskilled reflection on karma and rebirth can hinder one’s progress on the path of the Buddha.

In this book, Bhante Punnaji explains that the teaching of the Buddha is centered on the **insecurity** of life (*dukkha*), the cause of **insecurity** (*samudaya*), the cure for the **insecurity** (*nirodha*), and the way to cure it (*magga*). This **insecurity of life** (commonly called suffering) is caused by our emotions. It is this emotional urge (*tanha*) that brings about a relationship between a subject and an object; the subject being personalized as “self,” and

the object being alienated as other. It is through personalization and alienation that the “self” and the “world” come into being. With the coming of “being” (*bhava*), or “existence,” comes the concept of space and time. With space/time come birth, aging and death. This brings about the concept of “samsara,” or the pre-existence and the re-existence of “self.” In other words, the concepts of “samsara” and “self” are the result of the unconscious emotional arousal. It is this concept of “**self**” and “**existence**” that is at the basis of **insecurity**. Their removal, by removing the self-centered unconscious emotions, is the **freedom from insecurity**.

Lastly, on behalf of all members of Bhante Punnaji’s sutta class, we would like to thank Bhante Punnaji, who had reviewed, revised, and refined the book for many rounds. Special thanks go to Visakha for coordinating, Uncle Vong Choong Choy for giving wonderful comments & suggestions, Uncle Ravi for donating in kind, Sister Bodhi for coordinating with the printer, Sister Julie Tan for providing the soft copy for the first edition of the book, IMO Jimmy Yap and relatives who had sponsored in kind. Lastly many thanks go to the Committee of Management of the Buddhist Maha Vihara and all who had made this book a success. May the merits accrued from this effort help every one of you to be free from all sufferings of Samsara by gaining the ultimate bliss of Nirvana.

***Sadhu. Sadhu. Sadhu.***

**Hilson Sumana Yeap**

Website coordinator for [www.protobuddhism.com](http://www.protobuddhism.com)

# **Beyond The Horizon of Time**

## **Pre-existence and re-existence in Buddhist perspective**

*By*

*Ven. Mahathera Dr. Madawela Punnaji*

*“How can we live, turning a deaf ear, to the last dramatic questions? Where does the world come from? Where is it going? What is the supreme power of the cosmos? What is the essential meaning of life? We cannot breathe confined to a realm of secondary and intermediate themes. We need a comprehensive perspective, foreground and background; not maimed scenery, a horizon stripped of infinite distances....”* wrote Jose Ortega Y Gasset, in his book, *Toward a Philosophy of History*.

Throughout human history, mankind has been interested in knowing about himself and the world he lives in, in terms of space as well as time. Today mankind has, to a great extent, discovered what lies beyond the farthest limits of his vision in space, with the aid of advanced electronic telescopes and other highly developed scientific instruments, together with his ever progressing mathematical skills. Regarding his knowledge of what lies beyond the horizon of time, however, there is very little to boast of. We know very little about, what happened in prehistory on the earth and much less in the universe; so is our knowledge about the future of these great masses of matter that we call the solar system, and the galaxies. In recent times, there has been much speculation about the origin and end of the earth and even of the universe. But all these efforts have been mostly imagination and conjecture.

## The Past and the Future

What concerns us most in this book, however, is about the past and future of the human being. And what lies in the past, beyond the horizon of birth? What lies in the future, beyond the horizon of death? Mankind has been speculating about this all important question, from time immemorial. There are numerous myths and beliefs connected with this question in all primitive cultures. In fact, all religions contain some form of belief about what happened before birth, and what would happen after death.

As far as the modern scientist is concerned, however, he knows nothing and says nothing regarding what lies beyond these two horizons of time, though it is so important to the ordinary human being. In fact, the scientist would discard the question as baseless; for, it seems to be based on the assumption that there is a permanent soul in man with a past present and future, which the scientist does not accept.

Although everyone feels the presence of a “self” or soul within, the scientist points out that these feelings are nothing more than what they are – mere feelings. The reality of the soul cannot be proven scientifically, because no one has perceived it objectively, and therefore it is not acceptable to modern science. Hence the question of pre-existence and re-existence does not arise, for the scientist.

One might object to this, of course, because there has been much scientific investigation carried out by researchers regarding this subject and that many scientists believe in pre-existence and re-existence. The answer, unfortunately, is that scientific investigation has not proved these theories beyond



doubt, and that the belief of a scientist does not become a scientific fact, without scientific proof. For proper scientific investigation to be carried out, in this case, there must be reliable communication between two persons in two periods of time:

- (1) one present somewhere in the past, and
- (2) another present somewhere in the future. If they are both living in the present, then it is a matter of communication between two localities.

The purpose of this essay, however, is not so much to prove or to disprove this concept of rebirth, whatever the scientists may have done or said so far. Our purpose is to examine this concept of "pre-existence and re-existence" from a Buddhist perspective. But before we do so, it would be necessary to examine the meaning of this concept, briefly.

## **Meaning of Terms**

What we mean by the terms "pre-existence" and "re-existence," is in short: "existence before birth," and "existence after death," respectively. Of course we take it for granted that "we exist in this world," in the present. This is not a mere belief, to us; we regard it as a fact. To be conscious is to be conscious of "our" existence in "the world." This "concept of existence" in time and space, seems to be built into the psychology of a human being. All societies, all cultures, all individuals accept this "existence" to be a common human experience. Therefore, it is natural to question about the past of this existence: "Did we exist in the past, before birth?" We also question about the future of existence: "Will we exist in the future, after death?" Obviously, if we did not exist in the present, we would not be asking these questions. Modern existential philosophy is based on this assumption, though the Buddha questioned it.

Mankind in every culture has speculated about these questions. Many theories have been built around them in all ages. These concepts: “pre-existence” and “re-existence” have been given different names and understood in different ways in different cultures. They have been termed resurrection, re-incarnation, transmigration, rebirth, palingenesis metempsychosis, *punar-janman*, *punar-jathi*, *punabbhava*, etc. etc.

## **Resurrection**

*Resurrection* is a term referring to a concept that is exclusively Christian. It refers to a dead body coming back to life. An example is the resurrection of Jesus on the cross. Most Christians, however, believe that it was not the body but the soul that came back to life. According to the Gospels, however, it was the body of Christ that was resurrected, as it was lost on the third day and reappeared to the disciples later and showed the wounds on the hands. Christians also believe that the bodies of people will rise from the grave on judgement day. This is a belief which appears to assume that the soul and the body are one, or that the soul is within the body and inseparable from the body.

The belief that the soul is inseparable from the body was probably responsible for the ancient custom of preserving dead bodies in mummies and also of burying dead bodies. The custom of cremation is probably associated with the belief that the soul is separable from the body and that the burning facilitates separation. It seems that the story of Count Dracula is also based on the belief that the soul is inseparable from the body.

Some Christians believe that the discarnate spirit remains somewhere after death, and when Jesus comes at the end of the world on judgement day, they will be made to enter heaven, hell, limbo or purgatory accordingly. Other Christians do not think in terms of a soul but believe that the body dies and comes back to life on judgement day, which is called resurrection.

## **Re-incarnation**

*Re-incarnation* is a Judeo-Christian term, even though traditionally, neither Jews nor Christians believe in reincarnation. The term reincarnation originates from the Judeo-Christian belief that at birth God inserts a spirit into a human body, which is called an incarnation. At death, which is called discarnation, the spirit is believed to separate from the body and remain as a discarnate spirit. The term “reincarnation” therefore means that the discarnate spirit re-enters a body. This is a Judeo-Christian interpretation of the Buddhist idea of “rebirth.” Although some Buddhists use this term re-incarnation in ignorance it is important for Buddhists not to use this term as it conveys wrong information.

Though re-incarnation is not an orthodox Judeo-Christian belief, some Jews and some Christians also believe in it, and when they do so, they place the belief within the Judeo-Christian frame work. They like to think that God is compassionate enough not to judge or punish a person for what the person did in one life. Instead God is supposed to allow a person several chances through reincarnation to purify the soul. Therefore every reincarnation is a purging of sins until finally when one is fully purified by purging all sins, then one is taken to heaven. This belief makes the human world become a purgatory, and

this also dispenses with the idea of eternal suffering in hell. The re-incarnationists do not believe that a human being will be reincarnated as an animal, because they believe that animals do not have a soul.

Those who believe in reincarnation are called reincarnationists, but they are not Buddhists, nor are they Hindus. It is incorrect to use the term reincarnation when referring to the Buddhist belief in rebirth, because “rebirth” and “reincarnation” are not synonyms. They are two words with two different meanings. This is a common mistake made by negligent writers.

For Christians who believe in re-incarnation, however, the discarnate spirit re-enters a human body at birth. There may be several such human births, during which the soul goes through a gradual purification until it is fully purified, and enters heaven. In other words, the human world, to them, is the purgatory where the process of purgation takes place, through, several incarnations. Some even believe that the process of reincarnation has no end, as the purified spirits like Christ are also reincarnated from time to time in order to help purify others. The Reincarnationists are averse, however, to the belief that the human soul can enter animal bodies also. It is important to understand that Reincarnationists are not Buddhists or Hindus but are unorthodox Judeo-Christians.

## **Transmigration**

*Transmigration* differs from reincarnation. Transmigration is a word used in Hinduism, and it is placed within the Hindu Samsaric framework. The Hindu believes in the soul, *karma*, and the cycle of transmigration (*samsara*). The Hindu does

not believe that God puts a soul into the body at birth. Nor does he believe that the soul separates from the body at death and remains without a body as a discarnate spirit. The Hindu belief is that the soul transmigrates straight away into another body after death. This is transmigration. The Hindu also believes that the soul can even enter an animal body at death, where as the Reincarnationist does not believe so. The Hindu view is that this process of transmigration (*samsara*) of the soul continues, determined by *karma*. Karma is a natural law of punishment and reward for actions good and bad done during life. The purpose of the Hindu life is to put an end to this cycle of transmigration and be free from Karma, because it is so unpleasant. These sufferings of *samsara* and *karma* can be stopped only by purifying the soul through good behaviour and meditation. This purification does not happen automatically, or due to the transmigration alone, or even due to the power of God, but it happens due to a conscious human effort to purify the soul. When the soul is purified, it goes back to God, to whom it belongs, and where it came from. That is the end of the painful vortex of birth and death (*samsara*).

## **Metempsychosis**

The term *Metempsychosis* (*metem* = change + *psych* = soul) is similar to the term “transmigration,” which means that the soul changes or migrates from one body to another at death. This soul is believed to be able, even to enter animal bodies, and vice-versa.

## **Palingenesis**

*Palingenesis* (*Palin* = again + *genesis* = origination) is a term similar to re-birth, though often used in the same sense as

metempsychosis, involving a soul. Punar-janman is also a term having a meaning similar to rebirth (*punar* = again + *janman* = birth) but often equated to metempsychosis that involves a soul. The term *punabbhava* meaning re-being (*puna* = again + *bhava* = being or existence) carries the same meaning as rebirth, though this term, like rebirth, is used in Buddhism with a special meaning.

## **Rebirth**

“Rebirth,” is a term used by the Buddhists in a very special sense. For the Buddhist, “rebirth” means "a new birth after death." It is the birth of a body and a mind, without a soul being involved. No “soul” leaves the body at death; no “soul” enters the new body at birth; yet the new body and mind is the result of the old body and mind. Buddhists do not believe in a soul. Therefore rebirth is not explained as the transmigration of a 'soul' from one body to another.

## **Philosophical Implications**

Though this concept of pre-existence is generally considered to be an exclusively Eastern concept which had no place in Western thought, it keeps frequently arising in the minds of Westerners. It is a frequent theme in plays and novels. Psychologists write theses on this subject and clergymen author books on it. Currently, a team of psychiatrists are investigating cases of supposed recollection of former lives. Western thinkers are beginning to consider this concept to be of momentous importance in giving meaning to their lives.

The well-known psychoanalyst, and past life recall therapist, Brian L. Weiss, MD says in his Book, *Through Time into Healing* (pages 40-41):

*“I later discovered that in both Judaism and Christianity the roots of belief in reincarnation go very deep.*

*In Judaism, a fundamental belief in reincarnation, or gilgul, has existed for thousands of years. This belief had been a basic cornerstone of the Jewish faith until approximately 1800-1850, when the urge to modernize and to be accepted by the more scientific Western establishment transformed the Eastern European Jewish communities. ...*

*When I researched the History of Christianity, I discovered that early references to reincarnation in the New Testament had been deleted in the fourth century by Emperor Constantine when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Apparently, the emperor had felt that the concept of reincarnation was threatening to the stability of the empire. Citizens who believed that they would have another chance to live might be less obedient and law abiding than those who believed in a single Judgment Day for all.”*

Westerners, however, seem to think that underlying this concept is the concept of immortality, which they feel, is urgently needed in order to make their lives worthwhile in the face of the certainty of death. W. McNeil Dixon, the British philosopher and educator said in his *Gifford Lectures* (1935-1937):

*“The story of humanity becomes the story of a long procession of sufferers, for whose suffering no justification is offered....To live is, by universal consent, to travel a rough road. And how can a rough road which leads nowhere be worth the*

*travelling....Beyond all peradventure, it is the thought that death appears to proclaim, the thought of frustration....*

*Give assurance that it is not so, and the scene is changed. The sky brightens, the door is left open for unimagined possibilities, and things begin to fall into an intelligible pattern....*

*Immortality is a word which stands for the stability or pursuance of that unique and precious quality we discuss in the soul....Of all doctrines of a future life, palingenesis or rebirth, which carries with it the idea of the pre-existence, is by far the most ancient and most widely held, 'the only system to which,' as said Hume, 'philosophy can hearten.'"*

Edward Arnold comments on Dixon, in his *The Human Situation* – (London: Edward Arnold, 1937 and 1957):

*These words of Dixon clearly describe the typical attitude of the modern Westerner, interested in re-incarnation as a belief. The cause of this attitude seems to be the disturbance of the religious complacency of the Westerner owing to the challenge of modern science, in the denial of the soul. For, Dixon says:*

*"You have heard of this curious doctrine, of this psychology which rejects the psyche and retains only the 'ology'.... Where we imagined the – 'I' or 'self' to be, there is only, they tell us, a series of fleeting impressions, sensations, fancies, pains, and pleasures,'... no entity over and above them that, as centre or subject, thinks, feels or desires. It is then a mirage or hallucination, this notion of 'self.'... On every side today you meet with an exaltation of the 'intellect' at the expense of the*



*'spirit.' You may trust, it is said, you're 'thoughts,' but not your 'aspirations.' ... "*

(Dixon - Human Situation)

The challenge of modern science, of the notion of the eternal soul, of Western religion and culture, is obviously the reason for turning East to re-incarnation, in search of a defence of the soul. J. Paul Williams, Chairman of the Department of Religion at Mt. Holyoke College is even more explicit, in an article in the Yale Review:

*"The idea that human beings are just bodies is one phase of the notion that nothing exists but 'matter,' that 'spirit' is non-existent, that 'mind' is but 'matter' in motion. This position is one that scientists have expounded dogmatically. Because of the prestige of these men, many people have jumped to the conclusion that anyone who is thoroughly abreast of modern thought will discard faith in a 'soul.' ... "*

(Yale Review - Spring 1945)

Why the belief in a soul is so important for the belief in an after life, is explained by Paul Williams in the same article:

*"The argument for the future life which logically precedes all others is the simple one that if man is a soul, it is not unreasonable to suppose that he survives death. If man is simply a body, a physio-chemical reaction, and nothing more, it is obvious that he does not live again as such a body...."*

(Yale Review - Spring 1945)

Paul Williams even presents the common argument in favour of the soul theory:

*There are two ways to prove a thing. One is to show how it follows logically from other things that (are true). The other is just to point and say, "There it is ...."*

*I am among those who feel that they must believe in souls simply because they experience them...."*

In turning to re-incarnation for emotional support, in face of the challenge of science, they seek strength in Eastern religion.

Paul Williams says again:

*"One's emotional orientation to the problem of the future life is materially advanced when one realizes that the two great religions of the East - Hinduism and Buddhism - assume that the future life is a fact. It is not "wishful thinking" from the Hindu or Buddhist point of view to expect to live again; rather it is stark realism. But it would be "wishful thinking" from their point of view really to believe that religion has found a way to get off the "wheel of life"....*

(Yale Review - Spring 1945)

## **Theravada Concepts**

In his struggle to find support for a belief in immortality, the Westerner in confusion rejects the Theravada or Southern Buddhist concept of rebirth without a soul; little knowing that it is the only rational solution to the problem. F.L. Woodward says in the commentary to his translation of *Dhammapada*:

*"The Southern version, briefly, is that at death a man's tendencies and traits of character are (by a chain reaction of cause and effect) reborn in some other person or individual, but*

*without any connecting link of continuing egoity. The latter is the view adopted by Edmond Holmes: "The question which we have to ask ourselves with regard to the Buddhist conception is a simple one: "Is the identity between me and the inheritor of my Karma....as real as the identity between the me of today and the me 20 years hence? ..." If it is not as real, the doctrine of re-incarnation is pure nonsense. "Holmes continues, showing that the doctrine of Karma, the key teaching of Buddhism, becomes almost senseless when divorced from the idea of a re-incarnating ego."*

*Dhammapada - F. L. Woodward, Cunningham Press L.A. 1955)*

The problem of the Westerner here is the challenge by science of his belief in an immortal soul which leaves an emotional but irrational desire for a concept of continuity after death. In this situation, the Theravada position would be the real solution to his problem; instead of an emotional plunge into an irrational defence of the "soul." Only the Theravada position provides a rational answer to the challenge of science, in showing that the continuity of life after death is possible without an everlasting soul.

## **A Rational Approach**

Theravadins accept the scientist's position that the 'soul' is only an illusion. But they also maintain that the absence of a soul does not end life after death. The "mental process" which is mistaken to be the "soul" can continue even beyond death resulting in another life. The illusion of soul, however, can be maintained even after death, and life after life, until it is stopped through a conscious psychological process. As long as this illusion is maintained, there will be the notion of identity between the doer of the deed and the reaper of its results in a

future life. This identity will remain just as there is the notion of identity between the “me” that is born, the “me” that grows up to be a youth, and the “me” that becomes an old person that dies.

Even when the illusion of “soul” or “self” disappears intellectually, the emotional feeling of identity does not disappear with it. What disappears is only the intellectual notion of a permanent entity, called the 'soul' or 'self.' The identity that remains is a feeling that a “I” as a person or “self” continues within this life, as well as from life to life. When one becomes fully conscious of this unconscious experience of a self, one does not personalize the experience any more, which forms the illusion of “self,” but understands the experience to be impersonal, and is aware of the continuity of the impersonal experience. This full awareness of the illusion of “self” consciously, stops the unconscious emotional feeling of “self,” and also the continuity of life after death.

This continuity of life after death without a soul can be understood easily today due to the advancement of modern science. Today even children are familiar with action at a distance, when they drive toy vehicles through remote control. A driver of a motor vehicle can open a gate by merely pressing a button while in the vehicle. One can even lock a car, unlock, or even start a car from a distance. Today we are familiar with radio and television transmission. Understanding how rebirth takes place is simple for one familiar with modern scientific phenomena. Rebirth also works through wave motion like TV, or radio.

Even this rational explanation of rebirth without a soul does not, of course, satisfy one who is craving for a notion of

“self” and a permanent existence in the face of the awareness of death.

## **The Psychological Problem**

The problem here then is psychological rather than philosophical or scientific. The problem is the anxiety that all beings experience in the face of death. All living things including plants are struggling to exist. Yet the struggle is a failure because death supervenes. The individual always dies. What continues is only the race or species in the form of progeny. When we come to conscious beings, especially the human being, we find that the problem is not merely a physical one but it is also psychological. Fortunately, however, it is also the human being who ultimately finds the solution to the problem, by developing one’s consciousness. This means, becoming conscious of the problem, its cause, its end, and the way to its end.

The intelligent human being can realize that we are biological organisms that make a mistake in struggling to exist, although it is not consciously done by plants or animals other than the human being. It is the human being that can understand that we are seeking permanence in an impermanent world, and that this effort is futile, frustrating, painful and unrealistic. It is only by stopping the struggle to exist as an individual that peace could be attained. In other words, what we should seek is not immortality but freedom from the unrealistic desire for immortality, which clashes with the reality of impermanence and death. This way, one can accept death, not with a grin but with a smile of understanding, and peaceful tranquillity.

In fact, what we mistakenly thought as challenging our very being or existence, was actually a challenge to our false

notions and aspirations, which were producing the anxiety or suffering. If God is reality, then the acceptance of the reality of death and impermanence is the acceptance of God. It is the emotional feeling of "self" that comes in conflict with reality and creates the suffering or insecurity of life. Here we might recall the Gospel saying, "One who loses his "self" for my sake shall find it." Science, then, is not seen as our foe but as our friend. It is this original form of Buddhism, or Proto Buddhism, alone that can, not only reconcile science with religion, but also see the unity in the diversity of religion.

This Buddhist stand point is confirmed by Sigmund Freud in "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death:

*"To anyone who listened to us (in the West) we were prepared to maintain that death was the necessary outcome of life. ... In reality, however, we. ... showed an unmistakable tendency to put death on one side, to eliminate it from life. ...but this attitude. ... towards death has a powerful effect on our lives. Life is impoverished. ...*

*When primeval man saw someone who belongs to him die, ... then, in his pain, he was forced to learn that oneself can die too, and the whole being revolted against this admission. ... So he devised a compromise. ... the conception of a life continuing after death. ... After this, it was no more than consistent to extend life backwards into the past, to form the notions of earlier existences, of the transmigration of souls and of re-incarnation, all for the purpose of depriving death of its meaning as the termination of life."*

(Complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud)

## Scientific Proof of Rebirth

Many efforts have been made by writers and scientists to prove rationally and scientifically that rebirth is a fact. But all such efforts have not been able to conclusively prove rebirth to the satisfaction of all scientists. Yet this does not make rebirth less tenable.

The basis of the Buddhist belief is not merely the authority of sacred texts or tradition. It is based on a kind of empirical evidence. It is based on the experience of seers who have developed super memories and clairvoyance. The Buddha states in the Samaññapala Sutta:

*This, O King, is the immediate fruit of the life of a recluse. ... With heart thus serene, made pure. ... he directs and bends down his mind to the knowledge of the memory of his previous lives. He recalls to mind various lives in days gone by - one birth, two, three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, hundred, thousand, hundred thousand births, through many an aeon of devolution, many an aeon of evolution. ... ”*

*“In such a place such was my name, such was my experience of discomfort or ease, and such was the limit of my life. When I passed away from that state, I took form again in such a place. ... Thus does he recall, ... in all their details and in all their modes.*

*"Just, O King, as if a man were to go from his own village to another village, and from that to another, and from that, one should return home. Then he would know: From my own village I came to that other one. There I stood in such and such a way, sat thus, spoke thus, and held my peace thus. Thence I came to that other village etc.*

*“This, O King, is an immediate fruit of the life of a recluse....*

*“With his heart thus serene and made pure . ... he directs and bends down his mind to the fall and rise of beings. With the pure heavenly eye, surpassing that of men, he sees beings as they pass away from one form of existence and take shape in another: he recognises the mean and the noble.... the happy and the wretched, passing away according to their deeds....*

*Just, O King, as if there were a house with an upper terrace on it, in the midst of a place where four roads meet, and a man standing thereon, and with eyes to see, should watch men entering a house, and coming forth out of it, and walking hither and thither along the street, and seated in the square in the midst.*

*This, O King, is an immediate fruit of a life of a recluse.... ”*

*(Dialogues of the Buddha, Part 1, Page 90)*

This is how, to a Buddhist, rebirth is an observable fact not different from a scientific observation, using a special device or instrument. The Buddhist actually uses his own mind, as his instrument to verify the concept of rebirth. Just as a scientist uses his well made perfected microscope, to examine bacteria and viruses, the Buddhist uses his well developed purified and perfected mind to examine the past, present, and future, in order to understand whether rebirth is a fact or fallacy.

For the Buddhist the concept of rebirth is not an escape from death, however. It is rather a meeting of death, or continuity of death, from life to life, which is a disaster (*dukkha jathi punappunam*). This means the aim of the Buddhist is to



put an end to rebirth. This is done, not by seeking eternal life in Heaven, but by giving up the delusion of existence.

## **The Mechanics of Rebirth**

The mechanics of the process of rebirth without a soul was difficult to explain to people during the time of the Buddha. But with the advancement of scientific knowledge today it would not be such a formidable task. Modern people are quite familiar with transference of activity through waves, where no entity as such travels. They are familiar with radio and television transmission through electro-magnetic waves. It should be quite easy for them to understand rebirth as a process of transmission of activity rather than as the transmigration of an entity called soul. It is well known to scientists that the human mind is an activity rather than an entity. So rebirth is merely the transmission of an activity.

We know that a song is but the vibration of the vocal cords of the singer, which sets the air vibrating, which in turn sets the diaphragm in the microphone vibrating, which sets an electric current vibrating along a wire, which again sets an electro-magnetic wave vibrating in ether, which in turn vibrates a current in the receiver, which sets the air vibrating, which sets the ear drum of the listener vibrating, which sends a vibrating nerve impulses along the auditory nerve, which begins a vibration in the brain, which produces the sensation of hearing a song. The song was not an entity that passed from one place to another but an activity that was transmitted.

In the same way, a person is not an entity that passes from one life to another, but an activity that is transmitted from one life to another, just like radio or television transmission.

We know, today, that the brain and nervous system functions, electrically. Emotional excitement is electrical too, and it is this emotional energy that motivates action. Motivating emotional energy is what is called "Tanha" (urge) which Sigmund Freud saw as the "libido." It is this "Tanha" which is responsible for rebirth and which provides the energy for transmission. This energy, like electricity, has positive and negative aspects which are manifested in the form of "lobha" (attraction) and "dosa" (repulsion). What is called "Karma" is the excitement (*cetana*) of emotion in the form of "lobha" and "dosa" along with "moha" (delusion).

The more often an emotion is excited, the stronger it becomes and the easier it becomes to repeat. Emotions frequently repeated crystallize into habits and habits continued amalgamate into character. It is character which determines our destiny, both here and hereafter.

Rebirth, therefore, to a Buddhist, is not just a discarnate spirit taking another human or animal body. Every re-existence is a rebirth, to him. Even coming into existence in heaven would be considered a rebirth by the Buddhist, though from a Western religious stand point, it would be the entrance of the soul to Heaven.

There are several realms of existence (*bhava*) in which a being could be born, according to Buddhism. Broadly speaking, they are of three kinds: Sensual Existence (*kama bhava*), Imagery Existence (*rupa bhava*) and Imageless Existence (*arupa bhava*).

Sensual realms are again of three kinds; those where there is only the painful sensation, called the Realms of no gain (Niraya);

those where there is a mixture of pleasure and pain, which are four in number: Human (*manussa*), Animals (*tiracchana*), the Spirits (*peta*), and Titans (*asura*). The animals, spirits, titans, and the realms of no gain are together called the four realms of ill-gain (*apayas*). The third kind of sensual realm is the realm of pleasure only. There are six such worlds called the worlds of angels (*devaloka*).

The imagery worlds are worlds where extremely subtle forms of matter, or of energy, are present, and where some beings have even radiant bodies. These beings do not experience pleasures but they are happy. They are beaming with happiness, but only inner happiness derived from purity and tranquillity of mind. Pleasure is only a sensation derived from the stimulation of the senses by the environment, while happiness is an undisturbed peaceful and tranquil state of the mind. Youth delight in sensations and excitement, but the mature find satisfaction in tranquillity and peace. This means happiness is more mature.

The imageless worlds are free from images whatever, but there is either perception of infinity of space, infinity of cognition, the awareness of complete absence, or the uncertain awareness of neither sensation nor no sensation; the latter being the most refined state of existence.

None of these spheres of existence are permanent, however, though the life span may be very long. Entry into any such form of existence is called a rebirth, and the departure from that state is called death.

Beings travel from life to life, while the ultimate beginning or the ultimate end is normally inconceivable. The direction of travel, however, is determined by "Karma," the emotions

(*cetana*) that one lives with. The emotional state at the moment of death is what, determines where a person is reborn.

At death, the emotional energy is released, in the form of a wave, which has a certain frequency and wavelength. This frequency could be high in a person who is highly tensed and emotionally excited. Such high frequency waves are received in the worlds of ill-gain. Relatively low frequency waves are received in the human world and pleasure worlds. Lower levels of frequency are received in the Imagery Realms and even lower in the Imageless Realms. The lowest frequency being received in the Realms of uncertainty where there is neither presence nor absence of sensation.

Very rarely does a being enter these highest refined Realms. The great majority stagnate around the lower realms of pain and suffering. The progress in this tour of the worlds is not a matter of constant evolution, forever ascending the ladder with never a regression. It is rather an up and down, snakes and ladders journey, where there are more snakes than ladders. Just as there are more poor people in the world than the rich, and there are more criminals than saints, there are more beings that are descending the spiritual ladder than there are beings ascending it. An observation of the people we meet in life will make this quite clear. The Buddha once took some sand into his nails and said *"Just as there is more sand in the Ganges than in my nails, there are more beings born in the lower spheres than in the higher spheres of existence."* So was the opinion of Jesus when he said *"narrow is the gate to Heaven and wide is the gate to Hell."* But, of course, the re-incarnationists like to think of progression rather than regression:

*“In the Orient, the belief in regression of human souls to subhuman levels is prevalent. The Western re-incarnationist asks: is it conceivable that a human being with his remarkable mental power could be ‘encased’ in an insect or bird?”*

*“Would not the mere contact cause instant disintegration, just as high voltage power shatters a lamp?”*

(Re-incarnation in World Thought.

Edited by Joseph Head and S.L Cranston – Julian Press. N.Y.)

In any case, the Theravada Buddhist position is that because of this unhappy state of affairs, this continuous tour of beings from life to life, called 'Samsara', directed by Karma, is not a pleasant state of existence. Samsara is not immortality as the re-incarnationists like to think. It is only a continuation of a process of perpetual death. Therefore, the aim of the Buddhist is to bring this “unpleasant tour” (samsara) to an end.

This “tour” can be brought to an end, not by seeking eternal life in an unknown Heaven, but only by freeing the mind of the delusion of existence; by realizing that there is no being or person that does the tour. What continues is not an entity or soul but only a process of activity. When one is free of the delusion of “personal existence or being,” the painful struggle for existence and the urge to exist stops, as it has no meaning or benefit in continuing this painful struggle. This brings the suffering here and now, as well as here after, to an end. This is Nirvana, the Summum Bonum of Buddhism. The tour stops because the energy that keeps the tour going, which is in the urge to exist, has now stopped.

Suffering is the frustration of the desire to exist permanently in an impermanent world. When one realises that the urge

to exist is unrealistic and results only in suffering, because it clashes with the reality of impermanence and death, the urge to exist stops.

## **Is The Belief in Rebirth Necessary?**

One might conclude from what has been said that rebirth is an essential dogma of Buddhism and that Buddhists should always believe in rebirth. In fact, many, Buddhists believe that karma and rebirth forms the basis of Buddhist practice and that if rebirth is proven false, the Buddhist practice loses its meaning and Buddhism as an institution begins to break down. Fortunately this is not the case.

If we examine the Theravada Pali Nikayas, we find in the Apannaka Sutta and elsewhere, that “Kamma” and “Rebirth” are considered to be good, wholesome and harmonious views. They are considered good because they lead to the doing of good and the living of the good life.

*“As to this, householders, of those recluses and brahmins who speak thus.... There is no fruit or ripening of deeds well done or ill done; there is not this world, there is not a world beyond.... “ This is to be expected of them: Having laid aside these three good things: right conduct of body, right conduct of speech, right conduct of thought, and taking up these three bad things: wrong conduct of body, wrong conduct of speech, wrong conduct of thought, they practise them. What is the reason for this? It is that these worthy recluses and brahmins do not see the peril in wrong things, the vanity, the defilement, nor the advantage, allied to purity, of renouncing them for the good things.”*

*(Apannaka Sutta M.S. II 71) P.T.S.*

Although “Kamma” and “Rebirth” as views motivates one to do good, that is not the only reason or the best reason, accordingly to the - Nikayas, for leading a good life. "Kamma and Rebirth ethics" is "punishment and reward ethics" which is immature and self centred. The more mature form of ethics is based on a consideration for others and an interest in others welfare and happiness:

*"All beings tremble at punishment  
To all beings life is dear  
Comparing others with oneself  
Hurt not, nor destroy"*

(Dhammapada)

This idea is further elaborated in the Sutras and has been termed the “self reflexive” method of teaching (attupanaikam Dhammapariyayam). This is also the Christian Golden Rule: *"Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."* This mature ethic is based on "Metta" or universal benevolence, analogous to Christian love. *"Love thy neighbour as thy self"*; though 'metta' is broader in scope, in being extended to all beings: *"May all beings be well and happy"* (*sabbe satta bhavantu sukhi tatta*).

## **Concept of Good and Evil**

The Buddhist definition of "good" and “evil” is based on this consideration for others as well as oneself:

*"But what, Your Reverence, is good conduct?  
Whatever conduct, Sire, that is faultless  
What, Your Reverence, is faultless conduct?  
Whatever, Sire, that is harmless"*

*What, Your Reverence, is harmless?  
Whatever, Sire, is not ill in effect  
What, Your Reverence, is not ill in effect?  
Whatever conduct, Sire, is not conducive to the ill-fare of  
oneself, ill-fare of others or ill-fare of both"*  
(Bahitika Sutta M.S. II, 299)

The 'Kalama Sutta' makes it clear that a person who lives by this mature Buddhist ethic, does not have to worry about the problem of an after life.

"By that Aryan disciple whose heart is thus freed from enmity, free from oppression, untainted and made pure, by such in this very life four comforts are attained, thus:

- 1) *'If there is a world beyond... I shall be reborn in the happy lot..... '*
- 2) *'If, however, there is no world beyond..... in this very life do I hold myself free from enmity and oppression, griefless, and well.....*
- 3) *Though, as a result of action, ill be done by me, yet do I plan no ill to anyone...*
- 4) *If as a result of action, no ill be done by me, then in both ways do I behold myself utterly pure.*

(G.S. I, 127)

Therefore, though 'Kamma and rebirth' is considered a good view and a factual view in Buddhism, it is neither an essential dogma of Buddhism nor is Buddhist ethics based on this belief. Very few writers on Buddhism have made this point



clear. Therefore, it is very important to emphasise this. The point that needs recognition here is that Buddhism is a 'Kamma Vada' (speaks of action) rather than a 'Vipaka Vada' (speaks of results). This point is clear from the dialogue between the Buddha and Upali, the follower of the Jains.

*"Ven. Gotama, it is not the custom of Nataputta the Jain to lay down 'deed, deed' (kamma, kamma); Ven. Gotama, it is the custom of Nataputta the Jain to lay down 'penalty, penalty' (danda, danda)....."*

*"Upali, it is not the custom of a Tathagata to lay down 'penalty, penalty'; Upali, it is the custom for a Tathagata to lay down 'deed, deed' "*

(Upali Sutta, M.S. II 36)

Nigantha Nataputta, the founder of Jainism, was a contemporary of the Buddha. Here, it is Jainism that emphasizes the result of deeds in the form of punishment and reward. Buddhism, on the other hand, evaluates the goodness of the action by itself irrespective of its results in the future, by considering how it affects oneself as well as others, here and now, The 'Kalama Sutta' explains this clearly:

*"Now what think ye, Kalamas? When greed arises within a man, does it arise to his profit or to his loss?" "To his loss, Lord."*

*"Now, Kalamas, does not this man, thus become greedy, being overcome by greed and losing control of mind, - does he not kill a living creature, take what is not given, go after another's wife, lies and leads another into such a state as causes his loss and sorrow for a long time?" He does, Lord."*

(Kalama Sutta, G.S. I, 127)

Here, another point becomes clear in addition to the emphasis on the goodness or evilness of the deed by itself. There is also the emphasis on the mental state that, motivates the action. This fact is brought out dramatically in the '*Upali Sutta*' quoted above.

*"Nataputta, the Jain lays down that penalty of body is the more blamable..... penalty of speech is not like it, penalty of mind is not like it....."*

*"Upali,... I lay down that deed of mind is the more blamable... deed of body is not like it, deed of speech is not like it."*

*(Upali Sutta, M.S. II, 37)*

This contrast between the Jain emphasis on results and on the physical act, and the Buddhist emphasis on the deed and mental or emotional state, is clearly explained in several other places in the Nikayas. Therefore, the Buddhist practice is not based on the idea of "Kamma, Rebirth and Samsara"; rather, it is Jainism and other such religions that do so.

What this means is that the emphasis of the Buddha is not on the circumstances but on the attitude to circumstances. "Punishment and reward" refers to the circumstances one is in, and reacting to the circumstances by lamenting or being delighted about them. Action or kamma refers to one's attitude to the circumstance, whether good or bad. If one is in bad circumstances, and one responds to it in the proper way, it can be turned into a profitable circumstance, and be happy as a result. A good example is the life of Abraham Lincoln. Another is the life of Nicky the man who was born without hands or legs, who became a millionaire.

## Renunciation not based on Rebirth

Some may agree that the good life of the Buddhist is not based on the idea of rebirth, but when a Buddhist renounces, however, he does so either to find happiness in the next world or to solve the Samsaric problem of stopping the continuation of rebirth.

This, however, is not found to be the case when we examine Sutras like, Potaliya Sutta, Magandiya Sutta, Mahadukkhanda Sutta, Ariya Pariyesana Sutta and many others. The reasons for renunciation are to be found here and now. There is a Sutta in the Samyutta Nikaya where Mara (Satan) assuming the shape of a Brahmin... drew near to the bhikkhus and said:

“Your Reverences are too young to have left the world.... You are in your early prime now. Have the fun that belongs to natural desires. Enjoy, gentlemen, the pleasures of youth. Do not abandon the present pleasures, and run after pleasures of the future, which involves time.”

*“Nay, brahmin, we have not abandoned the things of this life to run after matters involving time. It is 'matters of time' brahmin, that we have abandoned, who are running after things of this life. Yea, brahmin, natural desires are 'matters of time,' so hath the Exalted One said, full of sorrow and despair; that way lies abundant disaster. But this doctrine is concerned with 'things of this life,' and is not a 'matter of time'; it bids a man to come and behold, it directs him inward, and could be known by the wise, as a personal experience.”*

(K.S. I, 147)

The above passage clearly explains, as does several other Sutras, that renunciation does not involve the need for a belief in a next life.

## **Belief in Rebirth is a Hindrance**

We might even venture, at this point, to state that the belief in rebirth can even be a hindrance to one's progress in enlightenment. This is because, to think of rebirth and samsara is to get entangled in the concept of time, and to do so is to affirm the belief in the continuity of an entity, into the past, present, and future; which is the eternalist stand point, experienced as an everlasting "self" that exists in time. If, on the other hand, we deny the continuity of an entity in time, we get caught up in the present and say: "Then there is no rebirth after my death," which is the annihilationist position. Thus the concept "there is a soul" leads to the eternalist stand-point and the concept "there is no soul", leads to the annihilationist position.

This was what happened to Vacchagotta when he came to ask the Buddha:

*"Is there a "self" (attattati)?"*

*The Buddha became silent.*

*"Is there no self (nattattati)?"*

*The Buddha became silent*

*"Is there neither self nor no self?"*

*The Buddha became silent.*

*"Is there both self and no self?"*

*The Buddha became silent.*

*So Vacchagotta got up and walked away.*

*Then Ananda, the Buddha's disciple asked why He was silent.*

*The Buddha replied:*

*"If I said there is a self, I would be in the eternalist position.*

*If I said there is no self, I would be in the annihilationist position.*

*I have always said 'all experience is impersonal' (sabbe dhamma anatta)*

*If I tried to explain this, he will misunderstand it and think 'When I die I will not be born again.' Therefore I remained silent." (SN IV 400)*

The Sabbasava Sutta in the Majjhima Nikaya explains clearly how one's progress is hindered through thinking in terms of rebirth:

*"The uninstructed normal person, unskilled in the Dhamma...thinks: "did I exist in the past? Did I not exist in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, to what did I change in the past? Will I exist in the future? Will I not exist in the future? What will I be in the future" How will I be in the future? Having been what, to what will I change in the future?" He is also doubtful about the present, and thinks..."am I existing now, am I not existing now? What am I? How am I? From where has this existence come? Where will this existence go?" To one who thinks in these ways, one of six views arise:*

- 1) "I have a 'self'..."*
- 2) "I have no self"..."*
- 3) "By self I am aware of self"..."*
- 4) "By self I am aware of not self"..."*
- 5) "By not self I am aware of self"..."*

6) *“It is this self that speaks, that feels and knows, that experiences now here, now there, the fruition of deeds that are good or that are bad, it is this self that is permanent, stable, eternal, not subject to change, that will stand firm unto the eternal.”*

*This, monks, is called going to views, holding views, the wilderness of views, the scuffling of views, the fetter of views. Fettered by this fetter of views, monks, the uninstructed normal person is not set free from births, from old age, from death, from grief, from lamentation, from pain, from sorrow, from despair, he is not free from suffering I say.*

*But the instructed disciples of the pure ones think thus: “This is suffering, this is the origin of suffering, this is the end of suffering, and this is the way to end suffering.” Because he thinks deterministically thus, the three fetters decline: personality perspective, cognitive dissonance, heteronomous morality.*

*(Sabbasava Sutta, M.S. I, 10 - 13)*

Genuine Buddhism, therefore, is not 'Kamma and Rebirth Buddhism'. Genuine Buddhism which is independent of time (akalika), speaks not about rebirth but about suffering (dukkha) and its cessation here and now:

*“One thing alone do I teach, monks, suffering and the cessation of suffering.”*

*(Anguttara Nikaya)*

Suffering, according to Buddhism, is 'existence' itself (*bhava*). Where ever there is existence', there is also birth and death! Birth and death are two ends of the same stick, 'existence'. Therefore, 'eternal existence' is impossible. We cannot remove

'death' and have 'existence' only. Death is not something separate from existence but a part of existence. Existence has a beginning and an end; birth is the beginning, and death is the end; in between is change, which is aging. Life is a dynamic changing process and not a static entity. Because existence is a static concept, it cannot be used to refer to the ever changing dynamic process called life. This means “existence” is a delusion. It is not a rational concept but “an emotional sentiment.” This is why the Buddha pointed out that this sentiment “existence of a self” is the cause of all suffering. Therefore it should be eliminated.

To be free from 'death' we have to be free from the notion of existence. Yet to be free from the notion of 'existence' is not to stop existing. To be free of the notion of existence we have to realise that existence, is only an “an emotional sentiment,” and not a rational concept. This means existence is not a reality. If existence is not a reality, then can death be a reality. By understanding “existence” in the proper way, we gain freedom of existence, 'birth' and 'death'. This is *Nibbana* the cessation of all suffering.

Therefore, “pre-existence” and “re-existence,” from the Buddhist perspective, is based on “existence now.” “Existence now” is based on an “experience,” which is subjective (mind) and objective (matter). Existence therefore is an empirical fact, but not an experiential reality. If one clings to the concept of “existence,” “pre-existence,” or “re-existence” one suffers. To be free of death and suffering, one has to recognize that “existence” is an experience and not an “existence” which “dies.” Therefore the Buddhist becomes free from suffering by recognizing that existence is only an “experience,” and not an “existence” that “dies.” This means there is no death if there is no existence. This is not a play on words, but a paradigm shift. It is a shift

from existence to experience. This cannot be done until we become free of self-centred emotions that blind us to reality and create the notion of “self,” which is only a sentiment, but not a rational truth.

It is quite clear that by playing with this concept of ‘Kamma and Rebirth’ we might more than burn our fingers, by getting entangled in, views about the ‘soul’ and losing our way to freedom from suffering. ‘Kamma and Rebirth’ therefore, can be a dangerous concept if mishandled.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, let us recall that this concept of pre-existence and re-existence though accepted in Buddhism as an empirical fact, observable by developed minds, and also regarded in Buddhism as a wholesome view that encourages good living, it is not an essential dogma of Buddhism; nor is it the basis of Buddhist ethics, nor even the basis of the life of renunciation. In fact, this belief is a hindrance to enlightenment. Therefore, it is wiser not to be dogmatic about it. Genuine Buddhism which is independent of time (*akalika*) focuses only on suffering (*dukkha*) and its cessation here and now.

*“One thing alone do I teach, monks, suffering and the cessation of suffering.”*

(Anguttara Nikaya)

The Buddha sums up his teaching about existence, both pre-existence and re-existence, and even present existence, in the Sabbasava Sutta of the Majjima Nikaya:



O disciples, an uneducated normal individual who is quite ignorant of supernormal individuals, and who is unfamiliar and unskilled in the supernormal philosophy and practice, pays unwise attention to what is inappropriate, but does not pay wise attention to what is appropriate. His unwise attention is as follows:

“Did I exist in the past, or did I not? If I existed, how did I exist in the past? From what form to what form did I change in the past? Will I exist in the future, or will I not? If I will exist in the future, how will I exist, or what will I be in the future? From what form to what form will I change in the future? He would even be concerned about the present. Do I exist now, or do I not? If I exist now, how do I exist? What am I? Where did I come from? Where will I go?

When he attends unwisely in this way, one of six views arises in him:

1. I exist as a self
2. I do not exist as a self
3. The self perceives the self
4. The self perceives no self
5. The no self perceives the self
6. It is this ‘self’ that thinks, speaks, acts, and experiences the consequences of good and bad deeds. This ‘self’ is permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and it will endure as long as eternity.

This, O disciples, is the thicket of views, the wilderness of views, the distortion of views, the confusion of views, the fetter of views. Fettered by this fetter of views, the uneducated, normal individual is not freed from birth, aging, and death; from

grief, lamentation, pain, distress, and exhaustion; he is not freed from the insecurity of life, I say.

O disciples, an educated individual who is cognizant of the supernormal ones, and is conversant with the supernormal philosophy and practice pays wise attention to what is appropriate, and does not pay unwise attention to what is inappropriate. His wise attention is as follows:

1. He focuses attention on the insecurity of life.
2. He focuses attention on the cause of the insecurity
3. He focuses attention on the end of the insecurity of life
4. He focuses attention on the way to end the insecurity of life

When he attends wisely in this way, three fetters that bind him to existence are eliminated in him.

1. Personality perspective, (*sakkaya ditthi*)
2. Cognitive dissonance, (*vicikicca*)
3. Heteronomous morality. (*silabbata paramasa*)

This way one reaches the first level of the process of awakening, from the dream of existence, which is called “Stream Entrance” (*sotapanna*); the stream being the Supernormal Eightfold Way, which leads to the cessation of the insecurity of life.

This *Sabbasava Sutta* points out very clearly that thinking about karma and rebirth can become an obstacle to progress on the spiritual path, as taught by the Buddha. This seems to be the original Buddhist perspective on the concept of pre-existence and re-existence.

An unanswered question still remains, however, which is, “How does paying attention to the problem of the insecurity of life eliminate the notion of ‘self’?” The answer is that this happens only when one begins to understand that the “notion of self” is not a rational concept, but an emotional feeling, and that this emotional feeling is the cause of the insecurity of life.

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Sabbadānam Dhammadānam Jināti  
The Gift of Dhamma Excels all Gifts

*May they receive the merits accrued from this  
Dhamma Dana  
And attain the Bliss of Nibbana*

*May all beings be well and happy*



*Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!*



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